



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on Belarus**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Douglas A. Davidson  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 13, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States has reviewed the report issued by the OSCE Office in Minsk.

The report, and the elections themselves, underscore our continuing concerns that Belarus has not undertaken reform of its election regime. The report notes that there had been no change in electoral legislation since the 2001 presidential elections. Since the presidential elections were neither free nor fair, we do not see how subsequent elections could reflect the will of the people of Belarus in a manner that is both transparent and free of manipulation.

Even in its short report, the OSCE Office in Minsk reported some indications that the electoral process was subverted. The report observes that 20.7 percent of voters cast their ballots in the early voting period. The unusually high incidence of early voting, absent safeguards, exposed the electoral process to a significant risk of manipulation in the tabulation of votes.

The political opposition was unfairly shut out from the electoral process, beginning with the formation of local electoral commissions. The report also notes that five candidates in the Minsk area had their candidacies withdrawn for minor irregularities three days after the start of early voting.

We call on the OSCE Office in Minsk to look further into the conclusions of opposition parties, the Belarus Helsinki Commission and the human rights center Vjasna that the local elections were marred by irregularities, particularly during the election campaign. We also look to the OSCE Office in Minsk to issue a public report that frankly and fully addresses the issues raised by the conduct of the elections.

We again call on the Belarusian government to comply with the recommendations made by ODIHR to reform its electoral processes and restore Belarus to the path to democracy, the protection of human rights, and participation in the community of Euro Atlantic institutions. We welcome the Belarus Central Election Commission's dialogue with the OSCE Office in Minsk and look forward to the day that this dialogue bears fruit in the reform of the electoral process.

Thank you.